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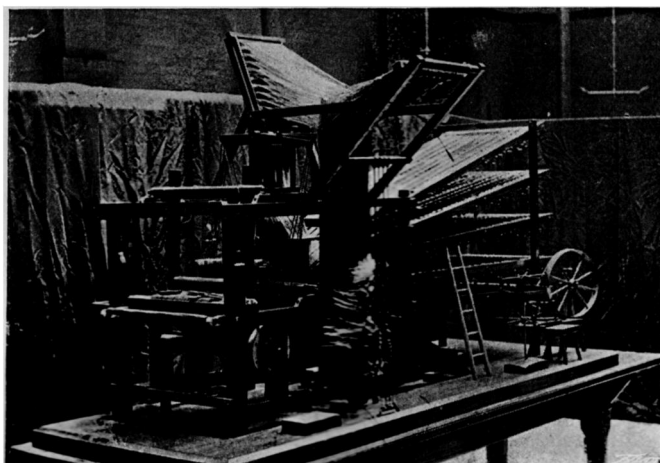
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MODEL OF OLD BRUSSELS HAND LOOM IN
KIDDERMINSTER MUSEUM

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY OF DESIGNERS.

ON THE DESIGNING AND MAKING OF CARPETS BY F. J. MAYERS*

(Continued from page 155.)

Each frame, of course, counts for a colour in the design if the colours are used 'all over,' but in the majority of cases one or two of the frames are planted, that is to say, several colours, or shades of colour, are arranged side by side according to a 'plant,' or index, supplied with the design by the designer. The pattern is produced in the loom by means of the 'Jacquard,' which lifts to the surface whichever frames are required, and allows the others to sink out of sight to the back of the carpet, where it is firmly bound by the weft threads, and forms the strong, solid backing which makes 'Brussels' and 'Wilton' carpets so durable.

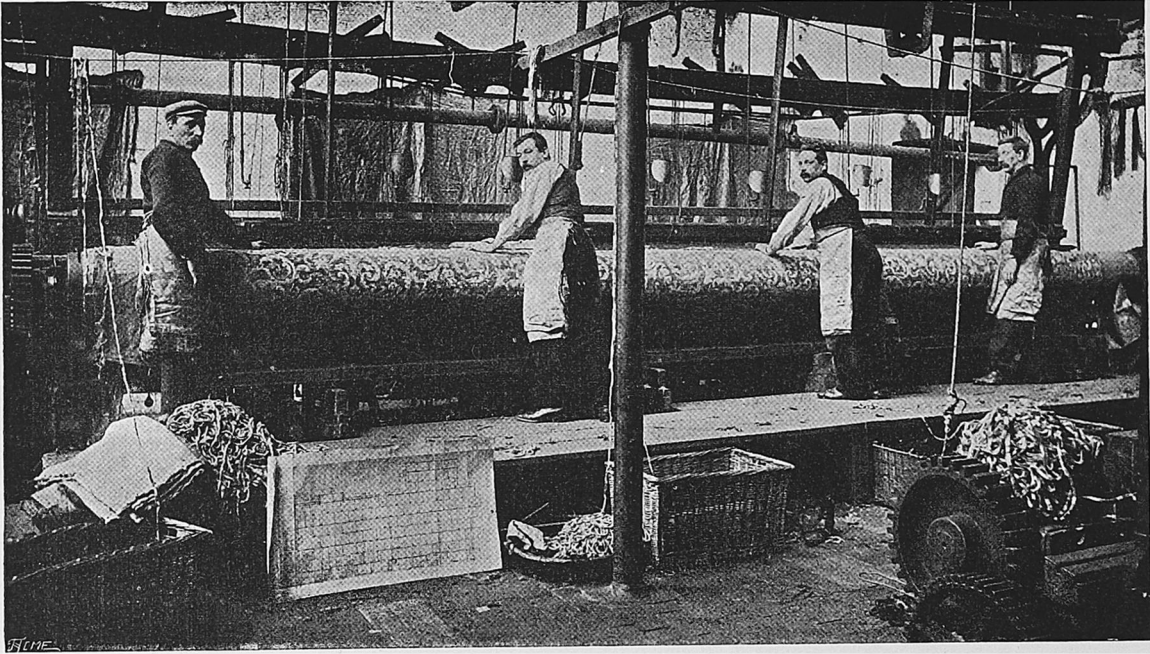
As far as the designs are concerned 'Brussels' and 'Wilton' are practically the same; they are produced on the same looms and they owe the difference in their surfaces to a slight change in the process. In 'Brussels' the threads, or rather yarns, which the Jacquard brings to the surface to form the pattern, pass over stiff wires which when withdrawn leave rows of little loops. In 'Wilton' the wires that are used are flattened out at the end and sharpened into keen little

knives, which cut through all the loops as the wires are withdrawn—leaving a rough velvet surface which is afterwards trimmed up evenly in the shearing machine.

We come next to the class of carpets known as 'Tapestry.' Looked at merely as a piece of woven fabric, this is to all intents and purposes identical with a piece of one-frame 'Brussels.' The whole of the surface of the carpet is formed of the warp, and the general weave is the same. It can also be made either with the 'Brussels' or 'Wilton pile' surface, according to the wires used. There, however, the resemblance stops. A brief examination of the pattern will show that it is produced by a totally different means to the 'Jacquard.' The pattern is obtained by printing the colours on the yarns which form the warp, before the carpet is woven. To do this the undyed yarn is wound round large drums. The designs must be done to standard sizes. In the matter of colour the designer has as much liberty as he chooses, but must be guided in his use of colour by the requirements of a cheap class of carpet that, whatever its commercial value may be, cannot rank high artistically. The successful

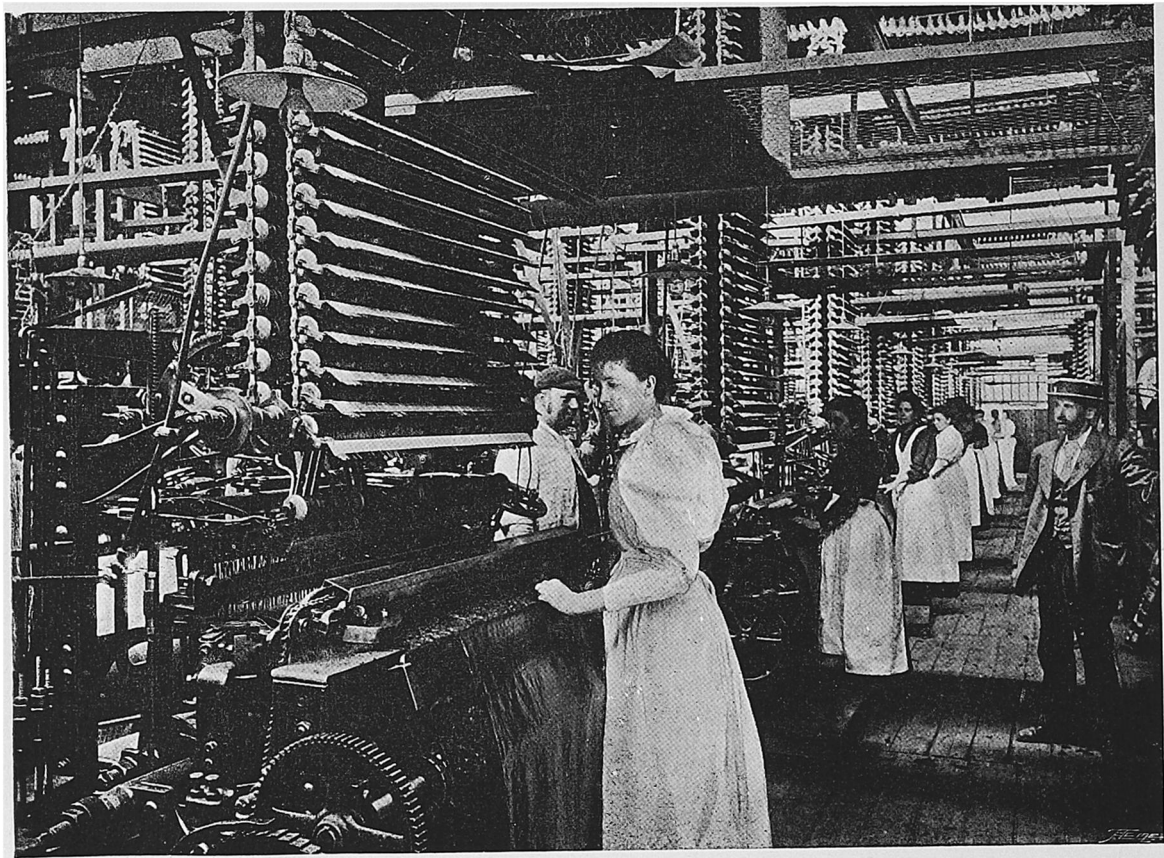
* Read before the Society by F. J. Mayers, of Kidderminster, on March 31st.

CARPET MAKING



EIGHT YARD WIDE HAND LOOM FOR CHENILLE CARPETS
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

(By permission of Messrs. Tomkinson & Adam, Kidderminster)



ROYAL AXMINSTER WEAVING
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

(By permission of Messrs. Tomkinson & Adam, Kidderminster.)

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draughting of 'tapestry' designs requires a certain amount of technical experience. The printing of the drums is rapidly done and there is always a little running together of the colours; the dark shades holding their own best and impinging on the lighter ones. The designer has to make allowance for this and counteract it to some extent by judiciously thickening or—in the case of single cord lines—doubling the light colours where his experience tells him that they are likely to be eaten away by the adjacent spaces of dark.

The last class of carpets I wish to speak of are the reversibles, comprising all the varieties known as 'Kidderminster,' 'Roman,' etc. Speaking of these a well-known writer on design says: 'Kidderminster carpet (a carpet not now made by even one Kidderminster manufacturer) is a common fabric suited to the bedrooms of middle class houses; but the art capabilities of this material are very small, as it can only have two colours in any line in its length. This carpet consists of two thicknesses, which are imperfectly united, and is not durable.'

I am not prepared to say that this statement was untrue when it was written, but as it appears in a widely-read standard work, and is certainly not calculated to improve the public estimation of 'Kidderminster' carpets, I may be permitted to point out how inaccurate it is now. In the first place, as many of these carpets are made in Kidderminster as in any town in the kingdom, and to my knowledge they have been made there continuously for the last twenty-five or thirty years. In the second place, it is not a pretentious carpet, but some varieties are used with the approval of competent critics with satisfactory artistic results. It may interest you to know that the lady whose name appears in our list of honorary members, H.R.H. Princess Louise, has ordered some for her own use, of the 'Roman' make; several of the same make are in use at Balmoral also. As to the art capabilities of the material being very small, William Morris proved the reverse of that twenty years ago, and some of the charming little designs which he did for the fabric are still largely and deservedly in demand. The statement that it can only have two colours in a line in the length, must be a slip resulting from a misunderstanding of the mode of manufacture.

Respecting the last assertion that the two 'plies' or thicknesses are imperfectly united, the first statement was true some years ago, but you will be able to estimate better the correctness of it to-day by an examination of the samples I have here. These are 'Jacquard' carpets, but contrary to the case of 'Brussels' and 'Wiltons,' the surfaces are formed by the weft, which is put in with shuttles and manipulated by the 'Jacquard' to produce the design. These carpets are made in two and three 'plies.' In the two 'plies,' two shuttles of yarn are used simultaneously in each lash, and so two colours are available in any line *across* the carpet. In the 'three plies,' three shuttles are used together and three colours of course are available in a line. Extra effects are sometimes obtained by using differently coloured warp threads.

I think I have now said all I need of the various makes of carpets, as regards the designs. How to work on the ruled paper is the first thing an apprentice to carpet designing has to learn; and to do it in a proper workmanlike way, the best—almost the only means of obtaining the requisite technical knowledge—is to spend a few years either with a professional designer or on the staff of a manufacturing firm. Unpractical ruled papers are an annoyance to the manufacturer and the attempt to translate them generally disappointing.

It usually takes three or four years' practice for a student to overcome the mechanical and technical difficulties and to sufficiently grasp the resources of 'draughting' to enable him to interpret properly a design of average difficulty which may be given to him in outline. Some styles of designs offer exceptional difficulty, and require considerable experience and artistic feeling to draft them satisfactorily.

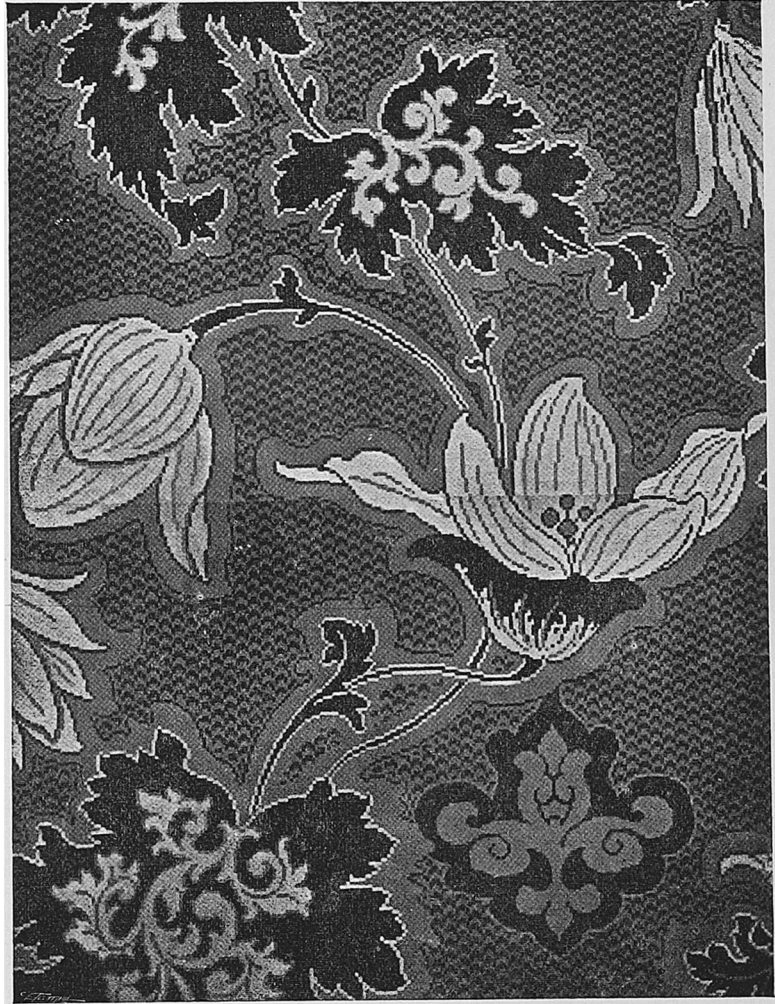
Before closing I should like to say a few words respecting the designs of Oriental carpets. The fine antique specimens which have come down to us, especially those of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, are universally esteemed as examples of what perfect carpets should be—and deservedly so. One has never learnt all their secrets, discovered all their half-hidden beauties and surprises, or fathomed all their suggestions. In their way of conveying suggestions beyond what is actually expressed, they are veritable poems. In perfect harmony with all

THE DESIGNING OF CARPETS

the essentials of an ideal carpet as regards plan, colour and treatment, and without in the least invading pictorial domains, they succeeded in weaving vivid 'suggestions' of the life around them—incidents of the jungle—flower-strewn fields—mysterious forests—mythological imaginings, etc., into perfectly appropriate ornaments. Their charm is closely akin to that of old tapestries. They draw us insensibly into dreamland; it is the spell of poetry reaching us through form and colour.

I have indicated already the limitations imposed on modern carpet designers by the relation in which they stand to architects, decorators and furnishers, but the prejudices of a partially educated public impose equally irksome and much less reasonable limitations. One fixed idea, that an intelligent study of the subject matter and treatment of the best Oriental carpets—excepting of course those produced under strict Mahomedan influences—

would surely tend to dispel, is that outside of flower forms and more or less abstract ornament there is nothing 'proper' for carpets. My own opinion is, that if we learn the secret of the proper *treatment*, as the designers of old Persia and India did, there is no reason why our choice of motives should be less wide than theirs, and why we should not introduce elements that would appeal as well to one's imagination as to one's taste for form and colour. We are told, for instance, that one's sense of fitness is violated by placing animal forms where one has to tread. As far as my personal feelings go, I have just as strong an objection to tread on tulips or orchids, if the *actual presence* of such flowers is represented to me. But as William Morris said, 'a carpet should give—not representations but suggestions,'



'WILTON' OR 'BRUSSELS' DESIGN

BY F. J. MAYERS AND G. H. WOODHOUSE

(Property of Messrs. Sheard & Co., Halifax)

and as a matter of fact it is quite practical so to treat floral forms that one receives no impression of treading on anything more or less than a carpet. And any natural forms so treated seem to me legitimate, provided that in themselves they do not suggest anything unpleasant or incongruous as in an example I have lately seen by a French artist. It is an extremely clever pattern of eels and water. As regards construction and treatment it is quite satisfactory in every way, yet I cannot but feel that a suggestion of dancing water and eels is not in harmony with the sense of stability that is desirable in a surface we have to tread on. There would not be the same objection to a pattern of peacock's feathers or tiger's skins. The old designers of the East, not being desirous

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'MOQUETTE' DESIGN
BY F. J. MAYERS AND G. H. WOODHOUSE
(Property of Messieurs Ed. Lainé et Cie., Beauvais)

of obtaining novelty at any price, simply followed their instinct as to what was 'useable' and so avoided similar errors.

If we analyse the impression produced by an Oriental carpet with hunting scenes, animals, dragons, clouds, trees, flowers, etc., there is never the slightest suggestion that anything but a carpet is under our feet. One is struck first by the glow of the colour—then the colour resolves itself into strange ornaments—and the ornaments into suggestions of natural objects that call into play the imagination and continually suggest some new fancy. So the carpet

unfolds itself to us as we get to know it—like the life story of a friend. May not such a carpet rank justly as a work of fine art? and is it not towards the opening up of similar possibilities in Western productions that the carpet designer's ambition should tend?

Of course it will be understood that this reference to Oriental carpets applies almost exclusively to the best antique specimens. Many of the modern productions are of very poor quality and scarcely bear comparison with Western productions of equal commercial value.